

Gift Wrapping by theamiableanachronism

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Summary: In which El and Mike have the relatable problem of being terrible at wrapping presents. Dustin and Nancy to the rescue.

Gift Wrapping

Nancy found him down in the basement surrounded by crumpled balls of wrapping paper, discarded (and forgotten) bits of tape stuck all over his shirt, and a box sitting in the center of a lopsidedly cut square of red wrapping paper on top of the table usually reserved for campaigns while he swore under his breath at yet another paper cut.

"Who's that for, Mike?"

Mike looked up, surprised. "... Eleven."

"Aww, that's adorable."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Nancy folded her arms and leaned forward with a smug grin. "You really do like her, don't you? Look at you so frustrated..."

"What?" Mike looked like he'd swallowed a fish. "That doesn't- How does that even me- I'm FRUSTRATED because wrapping-" He tried to pull the huge piece of red paper up around the box and then let out a hissed "Ah!" and put his paper-cut finger in his mouth. "Wrapping is hard."

"Mike?"

"What?"

"You're hopeless."

He rolled his eyes and picked up the scissors. "Gee thanks."

Nancy bit her lip. "Do you want me to help you?"

He paused, considering the disaster in front of him. He sighed, his shoulders slumping. "Sure."

"All right." Nancy stepped up to the table, an odd grin on her face. "But on one condition."

"What? What do you mean on one condition?" Mike said warily.

"I will help you... if you admit that you like Eleven."

"... WHAT? How is THAT fair? And no! I don't l-like her."

Nancy shrugged and turned to leave. "Okay fine. Bye Mike."

"Nancy, wait!" She stopped and looked over her shoulder. Mike sighed. ". . . It doesn't matter, okay? It's just...I want her to have a nice Christmas, okay?" He finished in a voice barely above a whisper and gave the tiniest shrug. Nancy stared at her clueless brother.

"Give me the box Mike."

Dustin found her in the living room. He came through the door of the Byers home and there she was, sitting in the middle of the living room floor. She was surrounded by thousands of scraps of green wrapping paper, covered in tangled ribbon and glaring at a small box on the floor in front of her.

"Hey, El."

"Hi," she responded quietly.

"Wrapping presents, huh?" He sat down cross-legged on the floor across from her, holding his ankles. She huffed through her nose and shrugged.

"Who's it for?"

Eleven's cheeks turned pink and Dustin's face lit up in a grin. "Oh, Mike, huh?" Her eyes widened and she slowly nodded, a small frown on her face as she searched his for signs of previously undiscovered mind-reading powers.

"You, uh, haven't wrapped it yet."

Eleven looked away and shook her head, cradling the finger that already had three paper cuts.

"I don't know how," she whispered after a long pause. "It's not like the

movies."

Dustin chuckled and scooted forward. "Well, you just need some practice. It's actually pretty easy, El. Here, lemme show you." He reached for the roll of wrapping paper and started to cut out a square with the pair of blue scissors.

"It has to look pretty," El said shyly. "Like Mike."

Dustin stopped mid-cut and bit his tongue. *Pretty like Mike*. He cleared his throat and swallowed the laugh that he could feel starting. "Well, we'll make it look... pretty for Mike. 'kay El?"

Eleven's small smile lit up her face and she nodded. Dustin grinned and started his demonstration, lifting up her box and putting it on top of the wrapping paper. "So what you do is you take this paper and you put this in the middle of it."

Over the next half hour, Dustin helped Eleven wrap her small box ("helped", of course, meaning that he wrapped it for her while he gently explained every step of the process under her rapt attention). He made sure to be extremely patient, one, because El was his friend and she was learning, and two, because he had the niggling feeling that if she cut herself on the paper or with the scissors, Mike would make sure he never saw the light of day again. It wasn't a strong feeling, but it was there all the same.

Christmas came a few short weeks later and Eleven's gift to Mike was wrapped so well in beautiful green paper that it put Mike's to shame. He tried to hide his embarrassment at giving her a present with his (what could only be loosely called) wrapping job, although that embarrassment didn't last long once he saw her smile. He sent Nancy, who was proudly smiling from the corner of the couch, a grateful look. Dustin was smiling at him, too, but it wasn't proud; it was more of a smug, "I know something you don't know" grin that was really annoying.

Fast forward to several years later: everyone has gone their separate ways but they are all eagerly planning to get together for Christmas this year. It's only been a few months since they've all seen each other, but even that feels like too long.

But it's a few weeks until then and Mike and El Wheeler realize at the same panicked moment that their wrapping skills haven't improved in the years since Dustin and Nancy started helping them (mostly because Nancy and Dustin have been helping them every year since).

Christmas gets closer and closer and their attempts to wrap each other's gifts on their own fail miserably. Before they know it, it's Christmas Eve and two separate but equally frantic phone calls are made from the Wheeler house, one to Nancy Wheeler, one to Dustin Henderson. A half hour later, the doorbell rings. Both Mike and El rush to the door, giving each other a funny look before throwing it open. Dustin and Nancy are on the other side, giving each other the same look.

"Nancy?" El smiles.

"Dustin?" Mike says.

"Mike," El quickly explains. "Dustin is stopping by for some... pudding. Yeah, pudding," she finishes, trailing off awkwardly.

"I... am also here for... pudding," Nancy chimes in, just as awkwardly.

Needless to say, an awkward silence falls over the group on the doorstep. Dustin clears his throat. "Hey, do you guys need some extra wrapping paper?" He holds up a large plastic bag with two tubes of wrapping paper poking out the top. "Because I...have some... right here."

Eleven beams. "Yes! Thank you!" she says quickly, pulling him through the doorway.

Mike clears his throat. "Uhh, Nancy! Hey, Mom sent me something that you need to see... all the way over here... in the guest bedroom... where the wrapping paper is..." he trails off and the group falls back into silence.

"Follow me, Dustin!" El says, breaking the silence and leading the way down the hallway. "I'll show you where we keep our wrapping paper. Thank you so much!"

"No problem!" Dustin says as he follows her, shaking his head with an amused smile.

Mike shrugs and Nancy follows him back to the guest room.

Over the next couple hours, Dustin and El wrap gifts in the master bedroom while Nancy and Mike do the same in the guest bedroom.

The next day at the Christmas party, the group exchanges beautifully wrapped gifts. It's a lively party that goes on into the wee hours of the morning and everyone leaves with promises to visit again the next day.

With their house quiet again, Mike and El pull out two final gifts. The wrapping of each is wrinkled and covered with tape and tangled ribbons. Shyly, they hand them to each other. They stare at the packages in their hands for a few moments, more than a little confused.

"Nancy said I ought to at least try and wrap it myself," Mike said quietly. El looked up, wide-eyed.

"Nancy?" she asked.

"I didn't wrap any of those gifts today. Just this one," he said, pointing to the gift on El's lap.

She smiled and covered her mouth as her shoulders started to shake.

"What is it?" Mike said, chuckling.

"I didn't wrap mine either," she says through a laugh.

"What?"

"Dustin taught me!"

"You mean you don't know how to wrap either?"

"No!"

By this point Eleven was doubled over, clutching her stomach. Her

laughter was contagious and soon they were both howling.

Once they'd gotten their breath back, Mike said, "We can always use gift bags."

And that just made them start up again.